

The Declaration of Independence and Slavery in Antebellum America
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Danvers High School
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United States History I
Grade 10

Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework:

- USI.3 Explain the influence and ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson.

- USI.35 Describe how the different economies and cultures of the North and South contributed to the growing importance of sectional politics in the early 19th century.

Historical Thinking Benchmarks Addressed:

- An understanding of historical debate and controversy.

- Formation of questions through inquiry and determining their importance.

Essential Questions:

- What is the purpose and importance of the Declaration of Independence in the Antebellum Era after fifty-five years of American independence?

- How do people in the Antebellum era, black and white, northern and southern, former slave and free, respond to the Declaration of Independence?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe how the different cultures of the North and South contributed to the sectional politics of antebellum America.

- Students will be able to identify different interpretations of the “All men are created equal” phrase in the Declaration of Independence, and the significance of these differences.

- Students will be able to analyze arguments from four primary sources from the Antebellum Era.

Learning Activities:

Please see attached documents for detailed instructions and explanations.

- Activity I: Bellwork/Activator
Assess the statement: “All men are created equal.”

- **Activity II: Preparatory Research**
Research the lives and views of the historical figures: George Fitzhugh, Frederick Douglass, John C. Calhoun, and David Walker.
- **Activity III: Evaluating an Argument**
Identify pieces of argument. Examine each piece separately. Critique the argument as a whole, whether or not you agree, explain whether or not it is an effective argument. (Define what an effective argument is.) Evaluate the argument by explaining your agreement or disagreement.
- **Activity IV: Socratic Seminar**
Through discussion, students will explore the depths of the political interpretations of equality in just prior to the Civil War.
- **Activity V: Application**
Give students a week to find an example of differing interpretations of equality in the media. Students should state the root of the problem as well propose possible solutions.
- **Activity VI: Problem Solving**
Write a letter to Thomas Jefferson, proposing alternate text for the Declaration of Independence, maintaining a document that would not alienate Southern states.

A ‘performance’ or ‘authentic’ assessment:

Participation in Socratic Seminar: includes entrance ticket, oral participation, and exit ticket.

Annotated Bibliography

Adams. “Socratic Seminar.” http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm

This teacher’s website includes guidelines for a Socratic Seminar, including a rubric.

Calhoun, John C. “Oregon Bill Speech,” 1848. Teaching American History,

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=944>

Calhoun’s speech

Douglass, Frederick. “The Meaning of the July Fourth for the Negro,” excerpt of a speech delivered in Rochester, NY, July 5, 1852. Presentation Given at the Teaching American History Grant Project Director’s Conference. New Orleans, Louisiana, October 2007.

Douglass’s speech reveals insight to the perspective of a former slave on the Declaration of Independence. Students will be able to identify the mockery with which Douglass describes the American celebration.

Fitzhugh, George. "Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters," excerpt of a speech delivered in Richmond, Virginia, 1857. Presentation Given at the Teaching American History Grant Project Director's Conference. New Orleans, Louisiana, October 2007.

Fitzhugh's speech received much negative attention from abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, and also from Abraham Lincoln in his debates with Stephen Douglas. Students will be able to recognize Fitzhugh's defense of slavery and attack on capitalism. Although he does not specifically mention the Declaration of Independence, he certainly reveals his opinion on liberty for whites and blacks.

Oates, Stephen B. *The Approaching Fury: Voices of the Storm, 1820-1861*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998.

Author Stephen B. Oates crafts the story of the coming Civil War through thirteen key perspectives. Its first person narrative creates 'passion, freshness and immediacy'. The conflict of differing realities, each identity believing their perspective to be truth, as well their personal conflicts and friendships, embraces the reader intellectually and emotionally.

Robinson, John and Dr. Dennis Lubeck. "Socratic Seminar." Presentation Given at the Teaching American History Grant Project Director's Conference. New Orleans, Louisiana, October 2007.

Walker, David. *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, excerpt of the pamphlet published in 1829. WGBH: PBS Online, Africans in America, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2931t.html>.

The son of a free black woman and a slave, Walker witnessed the cruelty of slavery first hand. His travels brought him to Boston where he worked with black activists. He published the *Appeal* for the enslaved men and women of the South, sneaking copies to them hidden in the clothing of black sailors.

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Activity I: Bellwork/Activator

To prepare the students for the lesson, introduce a quote that is a focal point in antebellum political debate, "all men are created equal." Direct students to respond to this statement in a class journal or notebook. This is an informal brainstorm and can take the form of a paragraph or a web. Students should assess the statement in regards to its meaning and validity in different contexts.

Ask students to share their responses so that they may hear different ideas. Do not allow students to respond to each other's comments, as time is provided for this later in the lesson. Maintain order of the class and have a student record ideas on a board or poster paper that can remain visible throughout the lesson as a reference. Students may also want to add ideas to this poster after completing the Socratic Seminar readings.

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Activity II: Preparatory Research

Directions for Teachers:

- ✓ Assign this homework for the day before the lesson, as it is required to complete the preceding activities.
- ✓ Divide the class into quarters, having each person in each quarter research one of the following men: Calhoun, Douglass, Fitzhugh, and Walker.
- ✓ The following day, students will meet with all students who research the same man. They will create the best acrostic detailing the life of their individual; they may need to take pieces from several acrostics. Students will present the final acrostic to the class on a poster.
- ✓ Poster should be displayed throughout the lesson as a reference.

Directions for Students:

Research the lives and views of the historical figures central to lesson: George Fitzhugh, Frederick Douglass, John C. Calhoun, and David Walker. Use one or two educational web or print sources. (An educational web source is generally identified by *.edu not .com or .net, .orgs are possible.*) Product should be an acrostic of their figure's name made with brief statements reflecting their life and beliefs as public figures.

Example:

Justified War with slogan "American Blood on American Soil"
mAnifest destiny
one terM President
EExtension of slavery into new territories
Schemingly instigated war
darK horse candidate
Wilmot Proviso
DemOcrat
49th paralleL: America gains Oregon

General Zachary Taylor attacKed by Santa Anna at the Rio Grande

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Activity III: Evaluating an Argument

Directions for Teacher:

- ✓ Each student will evaluate the excerpt written by the individual they researched with the guiding questions below.
- ✓ Students will group with others who researched the same identity and create a consensus poster.
- ✓ Students will share consensus poster for steps one through three with class and display as a reference for the rest of the lesson. Students should also share their evaluations of the arguments.

Directions for Students:

Complete the following steps in evaluating your figure's argument (point of view).

Step One: Identify the argument. What is the point your figure is trying to make?

Step Two: Identify the different pieces of support for that argument. What information does your figure give in defense of his point of view?

Step Three: Examine each piece separately by offering your analysis and opinion.

Step Four: Define, in general, what makes an effective argument.

Step Five: Regardless of whether or not you agree, critique the argument as a whole, explaining if it is or is not an effective argument.

Step Six: Defend why you personally agree or disagree with the argument.

Modification:

Have students some general questions about the documents:

- A. Tone?
- B. Intended audience?
- C. Underline one significant word, line or passage from each document. Paraphrase it in your own words. Explain what you know about the information (inference).
- D. Create a few content questions about the document. (These will generally have a "right" answer. They are used to check for understanding.)

Source: Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," a speech delivered in Rochester, NY, July 5, 1852.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, will all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy - a thick veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.

Source: David Walker, "A declaration made on July 4, 1776," an excerpt from Article IV from Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, revised Edition with an Introduction by Sean Wilentz, Hill and Wang, NY, 1995, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux

See your Declaration Americans! ! ! Do you understand your own language? Hear your languages, proclaimed to the world, July 4th, 1776 -- "We hold these truths to be self evident -- that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL! ! that they *are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights*; that among these are life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness! !" Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us -- men who have never given your fathers or you the least provocation! ! ! ! !

Source: John C. Calhoun. from "Oregon Bill Speech" 1848.

[The Declaration of Independence] ... asserts that "all men are created equal." The form of expression, though less dangerous, is not less erroneous. All men are not created. According to the Bible, only two, a man and a woman, ever were, and of these one was pronounced subordinate to the other. All others have come into the world by being born, and in no sense, as I have shown, either free or equal. But this form of expression being less striking and popular has given way to the present, and under the authority of a document put forth on so great an occasion, and leading to such important consequences, has spread far and wide, and fixed itself deeply in the public mind. It was inserted in our Declaration of Independence without any necessity. It made no necessary part of our justification in separating from the parent country, and declaring ourselves independent. Breach of our chartered privileges, and lawless encroachment on our acknowledged and well-established rights by the parent country, were the real causes, and of themselves sufficient, without resorting to any other, to justify the step. Nor had it any weight in constructing the governments which were substituted in the place of the colonial. They were formed of the old materials and on practical and well-established principles, borrowed for the most part from our own experience and that of the country from which we sprang.

Source: George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters*, Richmond, Virginia, 1857.

The Negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world. The children and the aged infirm work not at all, and yet have all the comforts and necessities of life provided for them. They enjoy liberty, because they are oppressed neither by care nor labor. The women do little hard work, and are protected from the despotism of their husbands by their masters. The Negro men and stout boys work, on the average, in good weather, not more than nine hours a day. The balance of their time is spend in perfect abandon. Besides, they have their Sabbaths and holidays. White men, with so much of license and liberty would die of ennui; but Negroes luxuriate in corporeal and mental repose. With their faces upturned to the sun, they can sleep at any hour; and quiet sleep is the greatest of human enjoyments.

... We do not know if free laborers ever sleep. They are fools to do so: for whilst they sleep, the wily and watchful capitalist is devising means to ensnare and exploitate (sic) them. The free laborer must work or starve. He is more of a slave than the Negro, because he works longer and harder for less allowance than the slave, and has no holiday, because the cares of life begin when its labors end. He has no liberty, and not a single right Free laborers have not a thousandth part of the rights and liberties of the Negro slaves. Indeed, they have not a single liberty, unless it be the right or liberty to die.

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Activity IV: Preparation for the Socratic Seminar¹

Directions for Teacher:

In a Socratic Seminar the teacher's role is minimal and discrete. The objective is to maintain an orderly and respectful conversation. A Socratic Seminar is not a discussion or a debate but a dialogue.

Emphasize that dialogue is exploratory, an exchange of ideas; students should suspend biases and prejudices and not seek a conclusion or right and wrong.

Teachers can modify this lesson. If the class is large, you can divide into 2 or 4 groups, instead of the entire class in the same seminar. Division into groups can be arranged to include students who focused on different documents or students of the same document group.

Students could create their own open-ended questions, pose a question to the group and then seek the multiple meanings of the text.

Prior to seminar:

Students will create 1 question from the following areas. This is their entrance ticket. If students have not prepared they cannot participate.

Suggestions for Questions:

World Connection Question:

Write a question connecting the text to the real world.

Example: What groups today could echo Douglass's argument about the Fourth of July?

Close-ended Question:

Write a question about the text that will help everyone in the class come to an agreement about events or characters in the text. This question usually has a "correct" answer.

Example: What about Douglass's life would have led him to make this argument?

Open-ended Question:

Write an insightful question about the text that will require proof and group discussion and "construction of logic" to discover or explore the answer to the question.

Example: Is Douglass's argument well founded?

¹ Adopted from: Adams. http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm.

Universal Theme/ Core Question:

Write a question dealing with a theme of the text that will encourage group discussion about the universality of the text.

Example: If this speech reveals Douglass's reaction to the Fourth of July, what do you project is Douglass's reaction to the Declaration of Independence?

Recommended student behavior guidelines during seminar:

During the seminar students will respond to each other with respect, careful listening, no interrupting, paraphrase essential items of someone else's response before replying, and make eye contact and use names to promote a respectful atmosphere.

Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.
4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
5. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
6. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
7. Listen carefully.
8. Speak up so that all can hear you.
9. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
11. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Seminar

When I am evaluating your Socratic Seminar participation, I ask the following questions about participants. Did they....

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not just to the leader?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?

What is the difference between dialogue and debate?

- Dialogue is collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding.
Debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground.
In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
- Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.
Debate defends assumptions as truth.
- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.
Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it.
In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.
Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions.
In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.
- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend.
Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding.
Debate assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.
- Dialogue remains open-ended.
Debate demands a conclusion.

Dialogue is characterized by:

- Suspending judgment.
- Examining our own work without defensiveness.
- Exposing our reasoning and looking for limits to it.
- Communicating our underlying assumptions.
- Exploring viewpoints more broadly and deeply.
- Being open to disconfirming data.
- Approaching someone who sees a problem differently not as an adversary, but as a colleague in common pursuit of better solution.

Socratic Seminar: Participant Rubric

<p>A Level Participant</p>	<p>Participant offers enough solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward</p> <p>Participant, through her comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text and the question</p> <p>Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant, through her comments, shows that she is actively listening to other participants</p> <p>Participant offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation</p> <p>Participant's remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text.</p>
<p>B Level Participant</p>	<p>Participant offers solid analysis without prompting</p> <p>Through comments, participant demonstrates a good knowledge of the text and the question</p> <p>Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant shows that he/she is actively listening to others and offers clarification and/or follow-up</p>
<p>C Level Participant</p>	<p>Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the seminar leader</p>

	<p>Through comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text and question</p> <p>Participant is less prepared, with few notes and no marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant is actively listening to others, but does not offer clarification and/or follow-up to others' comments</p> <p>Participant relies more upon his or her opinion, and less on the text to drive her comments</p>
<p>D or F Level Participant</p>	<p>Participant offers little commentary</p> <p>Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and question</p> <p>Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the discussion</p> <p>Participant distracts the group by interrupting other speakers or by offering off topic questions and comments.</p> <p>Participant ignores the discussion and its participants</p>

http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm

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Activity V: Application

Give students a week to find an example of differing interpretations of equality in the media. Students should state the root of the problem as well propose possible solutions.

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Activity VI: Problem Solving

Write a letter to Thomas Jefferson, proposing alternate text for the Declaration of Independence, maintaining a document that would not alienate Southern states.